

**HIGH DOWN HOUSE
PIRTON
HERTFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION**

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

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Version History

<i>Version</i>	<i>Issue date</i>	<i>Reason for re-issue</i>
1.0	21/04/10	n/a
1.1	11/05/10	Inclusion of HER and OASIS forms

Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

NHDC	North Hertfordshire District Council
CPA	Hertfordshire County Council Planning Archaeologist
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists



Non-Technical Summary

The excavation of four trial trenches in the grounds of High Down House, Pirton, Hertfordshire was carried out by Albion Archaeology in advance of proposed building and landscape works.

High Down House dates to the early 17th century and lies in an area of archaeological potential. The archaeological works were required by the Local Planning Authority as a condition of the planning permission. This was in accordance with advice received from the County Council Planning Archaeologist.

The trenches were positioned to investigate the locations of a new swimming pool and sunken greenhouses, and confirm the position of a demolished dovecote identified on historical maps.

The results of the trial trenching indicate that there were no archaeological remains present at the sites of the swimming pool and sunken greenhouses.

The site of the probable dovecote was confirmed and evidence suggests that the building dates to the late 17th century.

A rubble wall was also found nearby although its origins and purpose are unclear.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Background**

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) granted consent (ref. 09/01201/1HH) for the refurbishment of the grade 1-listed High Down House. The consent also allows alterations to the surrounding landscape and the construction of a swimming pool and sunken greenhouses.

The County Planning Archaeologist (CPA) advised NHDC that, as a condition of the planning consent, a programme of archaeological work should be carried out as part of the landscaping works.

This programme of work initially comprised the preparation of an archaeological assessment (Albion Archaeology 2010a) which identified the need for two targeted trial trenches in an area of tree planting to locate the site of a demolished dovecote (see section 1.3). In addition to this, the CPA requested a further two trenches to be opened at the sites of the new swimming pool and sunken greenhouses.

This report presents the results of the trial trenching that was carried out during 13th and 14th April 2010

1.2 **Site Location, Topography and Geology**

High Down House is situated in North Hertfordshire, 1km south of the village of Pirton at NGR TL 14403054 (Figure 1). It lies on a north-facing slope at 120m OD overlooking the village. The slope forms part of a rolling chalk landscape on the western side of a break in the chalk escarpment which runs east-west through south Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire.

1.3 **Archaeological Background**

High Down House is a grade 1-listed Jacobean courtyard house built by the Docwra family around 1600 as a secondary seat or dower house.

The archaeological background to the site, based on documentary, cartographic and existing archaeological data is detailed in the archaeological assessment report (Albion Archaeology 2010a).

A search of existing archaeological records within a radius of 500m of the house produced two records. These comprise the house itself (HER 1928) and an area of ridge and furrow earthworks (HER 9214) situated approximately 200m to the west of the house, close to Tingley Wood.

There is some suggestion, from a dated stone in the north-east gable of the stables, that an earlier house might have stood on the site. The walkover survey of the site, undertaken as part of the archaeological assessment, identified a number of slight earthworks that correlated with boundaries on 19th-century historical maps. From 18th-century references the house is known to have had a number of detached buildings, including a dovecote, the probable position of which is indicated on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps.



As the secondary seat of an important family, High Down would have had some form of designed pleasure garden. The majority of historical references to such a garden date to the 19th century.

1.4 Project Objectives

The specific objectives of the trial trenching were to determine whether any archaeological remains were present at the sites of the proposed new swimming pool and sunken greenhouses, and to confirm the location and nature of the demolished dovecote.

Any archaeological remains identified within the trenches were to be investigated and assessed to establish, as far as reasonably possible, their condition, date, nature and significance.

The broader objective of the work was to add to the knowledge and understanding of the archaeology of Hertfordshire and produce an archive report that fully described the archaeological works.



2. METHODOLOGY

Overburden was excavated from the trenches by a machine fitted with a toothless bucket and operated by an experienced driver under archaeological supervision.

Overburden was removed to the top of the archaeological deposits and/or undisturbed geology. The spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts. Any potential archaeological features were cleaned, investigated and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. The trenches were then planned and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence.

A detailed methodology is provided in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion Archaeology 2010b) which was submitted to the CPA for approval prior to the commencement of the fieldwork.

The project adhered throughout to the standards set out in the following documents:

• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001)
• English Heritage	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2006)
• IfA	<i>Code of Conduct</i>
	<i>Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation</i>



3. RESULTS

3.1 Trenches 1 – 4

Four trenches measuring 2m wide and 10–16m long were opened on 13th April 2010 (Figure 1). The results are detailed below in tabular form.

3.1.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located on the site of the proposed sunken greenhouses. No archaeological features were found in this trench. The exposed geological strata consisted of grey clay, which was covered by up to 0.3m of yellow/reddish brown silty clay subsoil.

Trench	Length	Width	Depth of overburden	OS grid ref.	
1	10m	2m	0.55m	TL 14469 / 30452	TL 14460 / 30446

Table 1: Trench 1, details

Context	Type	Description
100	Topsoil	Dark brown clay silt with occasional stones found at the base of the deposit, 0.25m thick
101	Subsoil	Mid yellowish to reddish brown silty clay with occasional small stones and moderate flecks of chalk, 0.3m thick
102	Natural	Mid grey clay with occasional small/medium stones and moderate flecks of chalk

Table 2: Trench 1, context summary

3.1.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was located at the site of the proposed new swimming pool. No archaeological features were found in this trench. The underlying geological strata consisted of grey clay, which was covered by up to 0.25m of yellow/reddish brown silty clay subsoil.

Trench	Length	Width	Depth of overburden	OS grid ref.	
2	10m	2m	0.55m	TL 14445 / 30486	TL 14439 / 30478

Table 3: Trench 2, details

Context	Type	Description
200	Topsoil	Dark brown clay silt with occasional stones found at the base of the deposit, 0.3m thick
201	Subsoil	Mid yellowish to reddish brown silty clay with occasional small stones and moderate flecks of chalk, 0.25m thick
202	Natural	Mid grey clay with occasional small/medium stones and moderate flecks of chalk

Table 4: Trench 2, context summary



3.1.3 Trench 3

Trenches 3 and 4 were positioned to confirm the location and nature of a demolished dovecote that is marked on 19th-century maps (Figure 2).

The remains of a building were uncovered in the southern end of Trench 3, matching the dimensions and position of the mapped dovecote. The building had been demolished to ground level and survived beneath a thin covering of soil and plant growth.

It was constructed in plain red bricks, bonded with a white mortar (303). The full extent of the eastern side of the building was exposed within the trench; it was aligned NNW-SSE and was 5.85m long.

A narrow foundation cut [302] was identified around the outside of the masonry to the north-east. Inside the north-east corner of the building was a block of brickwork (304), approximately 0.4m square in plan, constructed with the same type of brick and mortar used in the eastern wall. Inside the building, against the inner face of the walls, was a deposit of chalk rubble (305). The rubble fill was separated from a central hollow containing loose soil (307) by a band of bricks (306) which were laid without mortar. These bricks were a light red or yellowish colour with a shallow frog.

No closely dateable artefacts were found in association with the building remains.

Trench	Length	Width	Depth of overburden	OS grid ref.	
3	16m	2m	0.30m	TL 14440 / 30602	TL 14435 / 30617

Table 5: Trench 3, details



Context	Type	Description
300	Topsoil	Dark brown clay silt with occasional small stones, moderate tile fragments
301	Subsoil	Mid yellow brown silty clay with frequent flecks of chalk and occasional medium sized stones
302	Construction cut	Narrow area of disturbance observed around the outer edges of masonry (303) interpreted as construction cut for building
303	Masonry	Wall 0.24m thick consisting of brick in an irregular bond. Mortar, white with chalk flecks. Mid red bricks with red core, dimensions 230mm x 105mm x 65mm (9in x 4 ¹ / ₈ in x 2 ¹ / ₂ in).
304	Masonry	Block of brickwork, 0.42m by 0.41m, situated in NE corner of building. Mortar, white with chalk flecks. Bricks, mid red with red core, dimensions 220mm x 105mm x 60mm (8 ⁵ / ₈ in x 4 ¹ / ₂ in x 2 ³ / ₈ in).
305	Rubble infill	Chalk rubble with occasional stones and brick fragments
306	Masonry	Bricks laid without mortar in header pattern. At least two courses visible. Bricks mainly light red, some yellowish with one over fired black, dimensions 220mm x 100mm x 65mm (8 ⁷ / ₈ in x 4in x 2 ¹ / ₂ in) with a shallow frog.
307	Fill	Loose dark brown clay silt with occasional brick fragments and stones forming loose infill in central area of the building

Table 6: Trench 3, context summary

3.1.4 Trench 4

The south-eastern half of Trench 4 contained the remains of a wall (Figure 2). The un-coursed rubble masonry (404) consisted of flint nodules and small stones laid in a probable cut [403], dug into yellow brown silty clay subsoil layer (401). The wall was aligned NE-SW and appeared slightly irregular. The remains survived immediately below the turf and topsoil layer at approximately 0.15m below the surface.

The north-eastern end of the trench was machined down to the level of the chalk bedrock which lay 0.65m below the surface at this point.

The wall is not shown on the historical maps which date from the early 19th century onwards. The material used to construct the wall contained no dateable material; no tile or brick was visible in its make-up.

Trench	Length	Width	Depth of overburden	OS grid ref.	
4	13m	2m	0.25m	TL 14434 / 30618	TL 14424 / 30610

Table 7: Trench 4, details



Context	Type	Description
400	Topsoil	Dark brown clay silt with occasional small stones
401	Subsoil	Mid yellow brown silty clay with frequent flecks of chalk and occasional medium sized stones
402	Chalk bedrock	Solid chalk
403	Foundation cut	Inferred linear cut, aligned NE – SW, more than 6m long and up to 0.5m wide
404	Masonry	Flint nodules with occasional rounded pebbles, c 0.07m to 0.38m in size, mainly small

Table 8: Trench 4, context summary

3.2 Conclusion

The results of the trial trenching indicate that there are no archaeological remains present at the sites of the proposed swimming pool and sunken greenhouses.

The location of the probable dovecote was confirmed to the north of the House as indicated on historical maps. It was constructed of brick. The dimensions of the bricks, their colour, and the presence of a rudimentary frog all suggest the building dated to the late 17th century (Harley 1974).

The origins and purpose of the flint rubble wall found near to the dovecote are unclear. Its width and irregularity suggest that it is unlikely to be the remains of a building; it, therefore, probably represents a boundary wall. The absence of a boundary in this location on the 19th-century mapping suggests that it pre-dates this period.



4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albion Archaeology 2010a, *High Down House, Pirton, Hertfordshire. Rapid Archaeological Impact Assessment*. Report 2010/10

Albion Archaeology 2010b, *High Down House, Pirton, Hertfordshire. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Investigation*. Report 2010/19

Harley, L. S. 1974, "A Typology of Brick: With Numerical Coding of Brick Characteristics", *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. Vol. XXXVII



5. APPENDIX 1: OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

[List of Projects](#) | [Search Projects](#) | [New project](#) | [Change your details](#) | [HER coverage](#) | [Change country](#) | [Log out](#)

Printable version

OASIS ID: albionar1-76946

Project details

Project name	High Down House, Pirton, Hertfordshire
Short description of the project	Trenching evaluation and watching brief on landscaping works.
Project dates	Start: 13-04-2010
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI)
Current Land use	Other 5 - Garden
Monument type	HOUSE Post Medieval

Project location

Country	England
Site location	HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PIRTON High Down House
Site coordinates	TL 1440 3054 51.9611176262 -0.334814546057 51 57 40 N 000 20 05 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Albion Archaeology
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Albion Archaeology
Project director/manager	Robert Wardill
Project supervisor	Mark Phillips
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner

Project archives

Paper Archive recipient	North Hertfordshire Museum Service
Entered by	Helen Parslow (h.parslow@albion-arch.com)
Entered on	11 May 2010



6. APPENDIX 2: HER SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address: High Down House		
County: Hertfordshire	District: North Hertfordshire	
Village/Town: Pirton	Parish: Pirton	
Planning application reference: 09/01201/1HH		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: Mary Keen and Pip Morrison (07817 736360), Designed Landscapes on behalf of Mr Tim Dye		
Nature of application: Change of garden layout and creation of parking area		
Present land use: Garden		
Size of application area: N/A	Size of area investigated: 114m ²	
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 14403054		
Site code (if applicable): HDH1615		
Site director/Organization: Mark Phillips/Albion Archaeology		
Type of work: Trenching evaluation		
Date of work	Start: 13/04/10	Finish: 14/04/10
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: North Herts Museum Service		
Related HER Nos: 1928, 9214	Periods represented: Post-medieval	
Relevant previous summaries/reports: High Down House Archaeological Assessment ref. 2010/10		
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>The excavation of four trial trenches in the grounds of High Down House, Pirton, Hertfordshire was carried out by Albion Archaeology in advance of proposed building and landscape works.</i></p> <p><i>High Down House dates to the early 17th century and lies in an area of archaeological potential. The archaeological works were required by the Local Planning Authority as a condition of the planning permission. This was in accordance with advice received from the County Council Planning Archaeologist.</i></p> <p><i>The trenches were positioned to investigate the locations of a new swimming pool and sunken greenhouses, and confirm the position of a demolished dovecote identified on historical maps.</i></p> <p><i>The results of the trial trenching indicate that there were no archaeological remains present at the sites of the swimming pool and sunken greenhouses.</i></p> <p><i>The site of the probable dovecote was confirmed and evidence suggests that the building dates to the late 17th century.</i></p> <p><i>A rubble wall was also found nearby although its origins and purpose are unclear.</i></p>		
Author of summary: M. Phillips	Date of summary: 21/04/10	

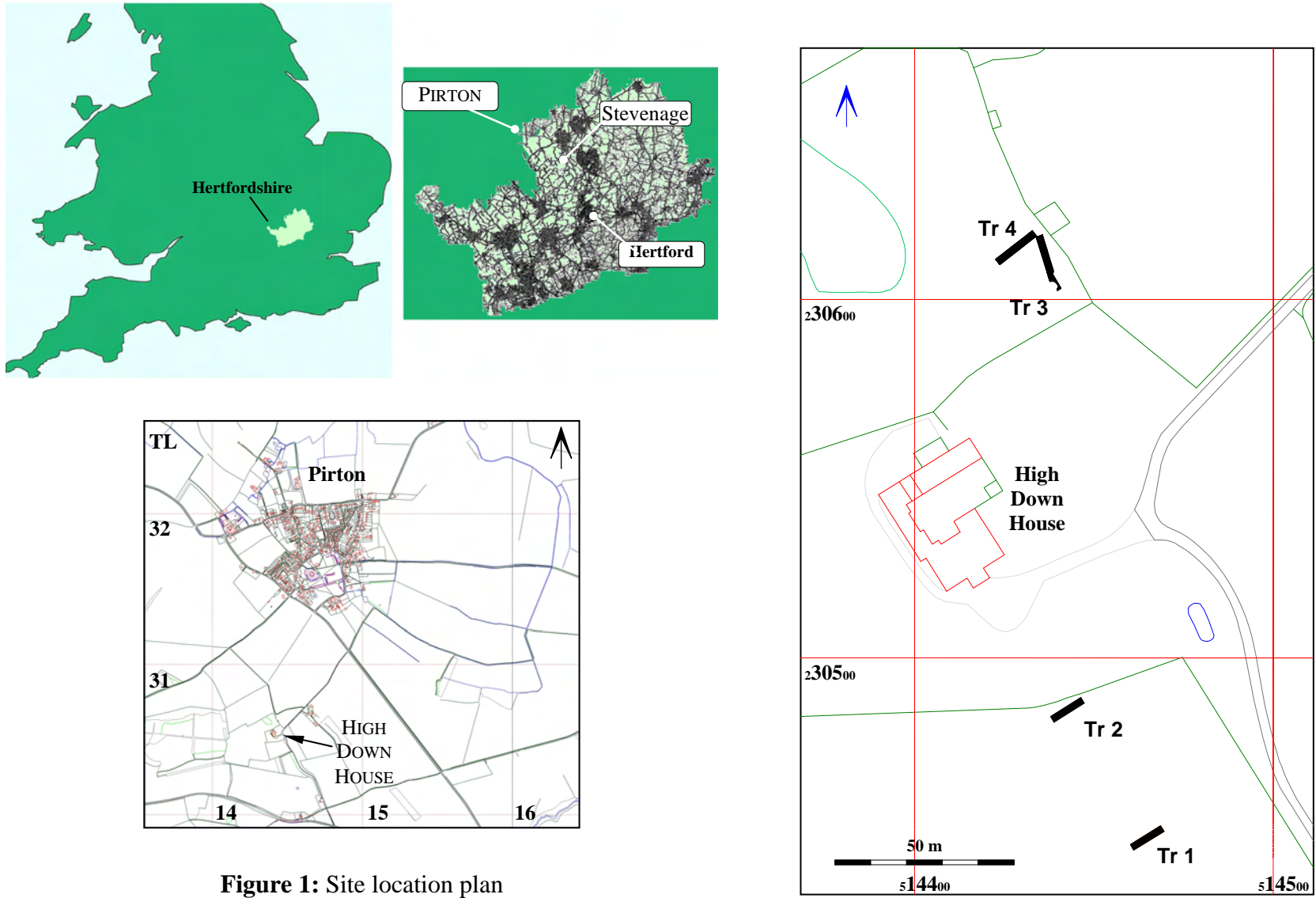
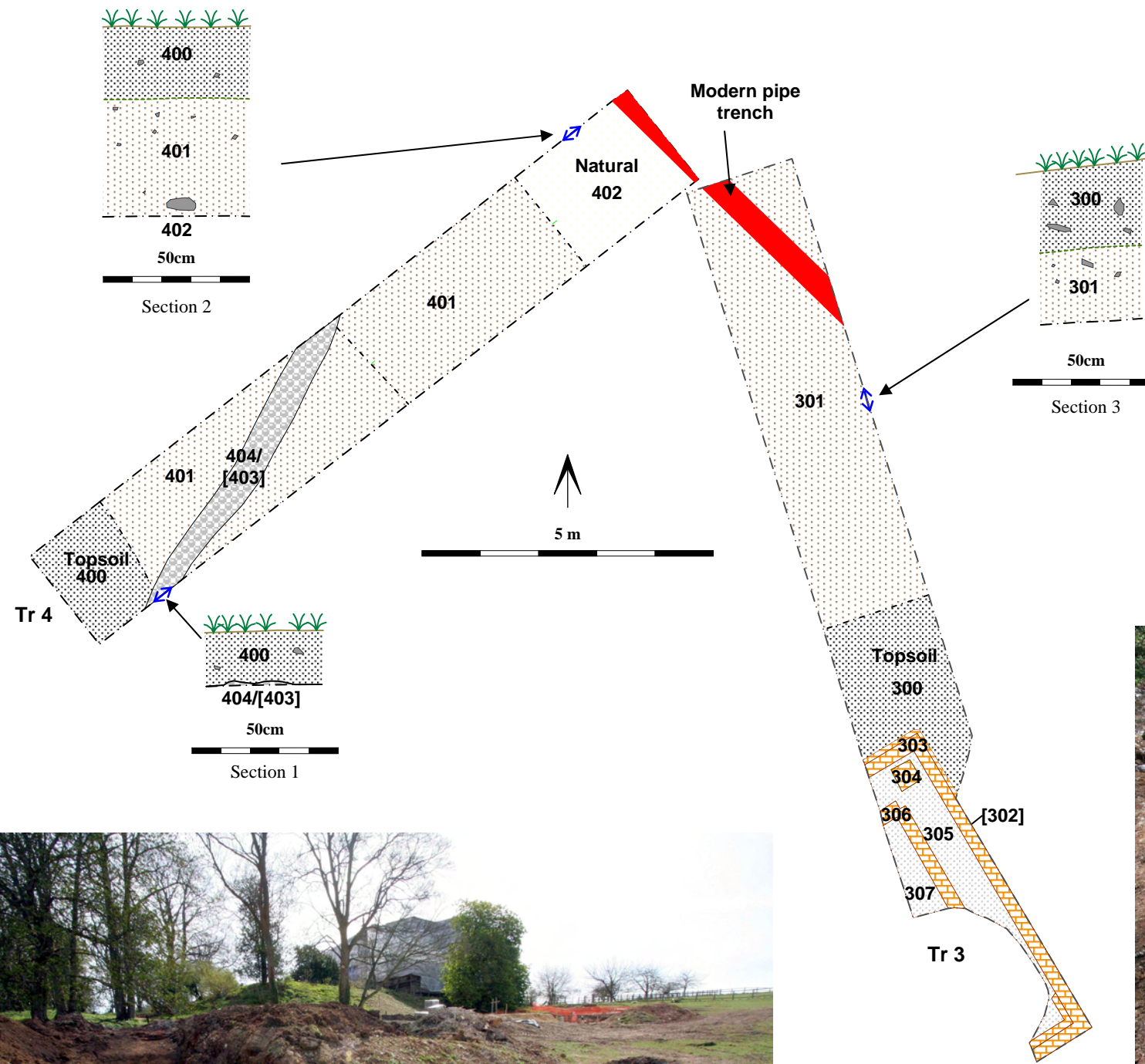


Figure 1: Site location plan

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Albion Archaeology, Central Bedfordshire Council, OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.



Wall [403]/404, looking south-west



Trenches 3 and 4, looking south



Dovecote remains [302] - 307, looking south

Figure 2: All features plan